

Send the bill to taxpayers

Commissioners to put \$2.2M county deficit on the tax rate

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Sullivan County residents are going to pay for the \$2.2 million dollar deficit from the last fiscal year through higher property taxes, but the question of when remains up in the air.

The increase for each taxpayer will range between 45 and 60 cents per thousand dollars of property value, said commissioner Jeff Barrette during a special meeting Thursday night to discuss how to handle the deficit.

"We do have the option to go to the delegation and ask for a supplemental budget," Barrette said. "For me, that's off the table."

At the end of the meeting a decision had not been made due to concerns over legalities.

"I've never gone through a deficit before," commissioner Ethel Jarvis said. "I'm not clear on how to handle it."

Barrette made a motion to include the deficit as a line item in the 2008-2009 budget which would place the entire tax increase on the December 2008 tax bill.

See **BILL** - Page A8

EAGLE TIMES

FRIDAY
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BILL FROM PAGE A1

The motion died for lack of a second and the commission asked county manager Ed Gil de Rubio to check with the county attorney and the New Hampshire Department of Revenue Administration about the legality of Barrette's motion.

The commission will meet again on Nov. 14 and 15 with county department heads to discuss cost cutting measures for the current budget and also make a decision about what to do with the deficit.

"I want to work on cutting the 2007 budget, too," Jarvis said.

The current year's budget is not meeting expectations, according to the commission, with expenses outpacing revenues by about \$2.2 million for the first four months of the fiscal

year.

Alarm bells were rung about the status of the current budget by Sunapee Selectman Bill Roach.

"We could be looking at a \$3 to \$3.5 million deficit," Roach said. "Some draconian steps will need to be taken."

Barrette agreed.

"We're to the point where we're going to sit around the table and start cutting things," Barrette said. "We're not at a point where we can politely ask for things. We need to take action."

Everything within the budget has the possibility of being cut, according to Barrette.

"As commissioner Barrette said, I don't think anything can be off the table," commissioner

Ben Nelson said.

Delegation chairman Peter Franklin, D-Newport, also had some suggestions for the commission.

"I also think there's a substantial amount of money that needs to be recovered from last year," Franklin said. "I believe Genesis was overpaid. The grant agencies ran a deficit and that needs to be recovered. The longer you wait the harder it's going to be."

The commission will meet with the nursing home administration on Nov. 15 at 4 p.m. to discuss making budget cuts. On Nov. 14 at 4 p.m. the commission will meet with all other department heads.

"The best we can do at this point is contain and not add," Barrette said.